



Invasive Species Fact Sheet—Golden Eagles



Golden Eagles on Santa Cruz Island

Golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) are among the best-known raptors in the world. One of the larger birds of prey, golden eagles are distributed worldwide. Golden eagles are fairly common in the west, where vast open landscapes and an abundance of prey exist to support them.

Golden eagles, historically only visitors to the Channel Islands, began colonizing the northern islands in the mid 1990s, having discovered an abundant food source in the feral pigs on Santa Cruz Island. It is presumed that golden eagles were previously excluded from the islands by the lack of a consistent food supply and by resident bald eagles. Bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) disappeared from the Channel Islands by 1960 following the deposition of hundreds of tons of DDT into the southern California Bight.

The problem

- Golden eagles prey upon the island fox, a unique species found nowhere else in the world. Roughly the size of a house cat, the island fox evolved in the absence of aerial predators and has been the top carnivore on the Channel Islands for thousands of years.
- From 1994 to 2000, island fox populations declined by 95% on the northern Channel Islands, primarily due to golden eagle predation. Island foxes have no native predators and many hunt during the day, making them easy prey for golden eagles.
- Ten years ago more than 1,500 island foxes ran wild on Santa Cruz Island. Today fewer than 100 island foxes exist in the wild.



What is being done

- Since 2002, 37 golden eagles have been captured and relocated into prime eagle habitat in the eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains. It is believed that less than a dozen golden eagles remain on the islands.
- The golden eagles that remain continue to pose a direct threat to the survival of the island foxes in the wild.
- The eradication of feral pigs from Santa Cruz Island will eliminate the critical food source for golden eagles. The Channel Islands lack the small mammalian prey that typically supports golden eagle populations (e.g. rabbits, squirrels, marmots).
- Nesting bald eagles are highly territorial and it is hoped that new bald eagle pairs will deter golden eagles from establishing on the northern Channel Islands.

